

Conference Abstract

Betwixt and Between: Bridging the Gap Between Field and Repository

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Abstract

All too often, archaeologists have viewed curation as a process that manages, rather than investigates, archaeological and natural history collections. The curation crisis can be understood as the result of a serious imbalance between the continued generation of field collections and a corresponding lack of resources and facilities devoted to accessioning, analyzing, reporting, curating and otherwise caring for these collections. Researchers mistakenly prioritize ‘interpretation at the trowel’s edge’ with emphasis on excavation and field work, without considering the problem of how and where to store the objects they excavate.

While legislation, Curation of Federally Owned and Administered Archaeological Collections (36 C.F.R. Part 79), was intended to ensure the long-term management and care of these resources, the absence of funding at the institutional and federal levels, nonexistent enforcement of the legislation through the National Park Service, and lack of compliance from field archaeologists, have resulted in collections throughout the United States being at risk of loss through deterioration, mismanagement, and neglect. I will demonstrate that accessioning, inventorying, cataloguing, rehousing and conserving are meaningful generative encounters between scholars, objects and collections staff, not simply byproducts of research. The need for an online database specifically set up for archaeological collections is suggested as a way to address the curation crisis. Implementing digitization will enhance preservation by reducing damage to the artifacts

caused by physical handling. Persons working within the field will gain a better understanding of collections care and the collections transition to the repository.

Keywords

Archaeology, Collections Care, Collections Mangement

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